

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 08177660 5

ICE
(B., A.F.)

For sale, by

Miss Carrie H. Perkins

29 Monument Ave.

Bennington Vt.

.25 - 10

3447

The Battle of Bennington

revised by A. E. D. 2

SECOND EDITION

1908

(335)

Checked
May 1913

1GE

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
297393B

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

R 1944 L

This Sketch is Dedicated to the Memory of

The Rev. Isaac Jennings

Sometime Pastor of the First Church of

Bennington and Author of

“ Memorials of a Century ”

Gift of Mrs. Chaucey H. Beech, Nov. 5, 1908.

“**B**ENNINGTON, in fact, was one of the most important fights of the Revolution, contributing as it did so largely to the final surrender of Burgoyne’s whole army at Saratoga, and the utter ruin of the British invasion from the north. It is also interesting as an extremely gallant bit of fighting. . . . There stood the enemy strongly intrenched on a hill, and Stark, calling his undisciplined lines about him, went at them. . . . He and his men fought well their hand-to-hand fight on that hot August day, and carried the intrenchments filled with regular troops and defended by artillery. It was a daring feat of arms, as well as a battle which had an important effect upon the course of history and upon the fate of the British empire in America.”

HENRY CABOT LODGE.

The Battle of Bennington

A summer visitor who takes an interest in the local history of New England, has only to arrive there, to learn that the charming village of Bennington Centre, or "Old Bennington," is not the least in its appeal. It was the scene of some of the most remarkable incidents in the romantic early history of Vermont. There the State of Vermont was born.¹ The white meeting-house, a hundred years old, stands on the green, opposite the oldest inn in the State. Near this the first settler²

built his log cabin. His sturdy wife, in his absence, when the wolves came howling round at night, seized fire-brands from her hearth, opened the door, waved the pieces of burning wood, shouted with all her strength,—and the wild beasts retreated.

Not far from the site of the first home of a white man in the wilderness, a terrible looking beast still lingers. A catamount, cast in bronze, is on a granite pedestal. An ugly grin is perpetual on its horrid face. It looks ready to attack. The image snarls defiance toward New York — only three miles off to the west. The cannon at the monument point in the same direction, as if in warning to a possible intruder from that quarter. There is at present no unfriendly sentiment for the Empire State. But

history is made picturesque. Bennington does not want to forget the past. The inquisitive visitor is excited to ask what the statue means.

One may have learned something of the story, and then forgotten. Now, it is too vivid, there on the spot, ever again to be lost. Vermont was once disputed territory, known as "The New Hampshire Grants." The claims of New York were resisted by an armed force known as "The Green Mountain Boys," led by Ethan Allen and Seth Warner, all determined to "act the bold and manly part." And they did maintain their right to the lands which they had bought in good faith from New Hampshire; and improved by their race instinct for industry, for law, for settled homes. In the days

of that struggle with the hated "Yorkers," the stuffed hide of a catamount was used as a sign in front of Captain Fay's celebrated tavern, put there in grim earnest to warn intruders how the pioneer settlers were ready to defend their titles to the Green Mountain Country.

Bennington was the centre of resistance, the headquarters of the active opponents of New York, the residence of Ethan Allen and Seth Warner, who led the settlers in their fight with New York.

And right in the midst of their struggle for their own, they were prompt to rise above their local interests and risk their lives and property for a larger cause. They took part on the side commanded by Washington, when they were denied

what they asked, to be one of the United States.

We all know, we do not have to spend a month in Bennington to find out, that Ethan Allen, at the head of Green Mountain Boys, surprised the garrison at Ticonderoga on a May morning in 1775, and captured the fortress "in the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress," and that Warner was a brave soldier, who did a great deal to help Stark win the Battle of Bennington.

But once on the very spot where these men lived and played their parts in the great drama, one goes deeper into the story. That same visitor mentioned a little farther back — it was the writer — used to sit of a beautiful summer afternoon on the steps of the "Old Academy," a brick

building. In its day, "it was a great place for learning," I once heard one man inform another, in a respectful tone, as they passed. As I read, more than once a pilgrim who had climbed the hill for a close view of the monument which dominates the scene, stopped and asked why the massive obelisk was not erected on the spot where the famous victory was won, six miles away, by "The Walloomsac," but instead, where it is on the top of the hill; it was a pleasure to impart to another eager for the knowledge, recently acquired facts; to deliver an historical lecture, as it were, from a platform.

The attempt was made with alacrity to explain; perhaps it was more copious than the interlocutor wanted. But it does take a little time to make

it clear that the monument was erected on the site of the Continental store houses which were the object of Colonel Baum's expedition, and not on the battle ground, because the place where the battle was fought is now included in the State of New York. The victory was won by the militia and volunteers of Vermont, Massachusetts and New York. When in 1782, the border line between Vermont and New York was agreed upon by Congress, the fortifications made by Colonel Baum and his troops, which Stark and his men assaulted and carried, came within the limits of New York. Yet New York, in the person of General Schuyler,³ had declined to "notice a fourteenth State unknown to the Confederacy," when appealed to for aid before the

battle. Plainly — when one thinks over exactly how it all was — that was no place for a monument in memory of a signal exploit in which New York, as a state, did not take part.

The land title controversy, the reason why New York received no trophies from the battle field, the battle — on the spot, one lives in the stirring past of the little old town on the hill, which speaks to those attentive to its story, of brave old times ; of men and women who did indeed have the capacity for the emergencies of their lives. You are fortunate if you stay awhile and linger over “Memorials of a Century.” The well-worn volume, out of print, cherished by its owner, loaned as one lets another have a treasure, is a valuable accumulation, a record of individuals

and events in the early history of Bennington. You must have leisure for the story as it comes out in the old book. Any one who takes time over those local annals, will gain a vivid impression of individuals who make a general conclusion possible. The history of the time is made more alive because we realize that man after man lived, and did something to help, thanks to a student who valued each person for his essential worth, and preserved all that he heard of the past which seemed credible, traditional anecdotes which otherwise would have perished.

If, however, you come to Bennington, only for a day or two, and want to know more about the battle than the accounts in the general histories, perhaps this may be a substitute. It

is a narrative based mainly on "The Memorials," shaped so as to bring into the story, which includes the greatest day in the history of the village, what the heroes, whose names are on the roll of the patriots of Bennington, did to help the cause.

Amid the peace and quiet of a summer afternoon in 1907, Pastor Jennings makes it real to his reader how altogether different it was at the same time of year in 1777. They were not taking life easily in Bennington and the neighborhood during *those* midsummer days. It was a time of anxiety, when some lived in fear and trembling. On the 5th of July, when daylight came, the Americans within the fortress of Ticonderoga saw a party of redcoats on the bold summit of a hill to the south,

which had been pronounced by military experts inaccessible. But the redcoats had climbed "where a goat could go," and had dragged cannon after them. Once a hostile battery was planted there, the only thing to do was to evacuate Ticonderoga, which St. Clair, under cover of the next night, did.

This was bad news for the patriot side. But George III. felt exultant. He rushed to Queen Charlotte the minute after he read the dispatches from America, shouting: "I have beaten them! I have beaten all the Americans!"

Reverses were indeed serious that summer on the American side of the war. Not only was Ticonderoga given up, but Warner, after a brave stand, was defeated at Hubbardton,

though his men wasted no lead in aimless firing, and their volleys made big gaps in the redcoat line.

John Adams remarked that it was high time for the Americans to shoot one or two of their generals as a warning to the rest. Even Washington, a man not easily depressed, wrote to Putnam: "As matters are going" — there were other disasters—" Burgoyne will have little difficulty in penetrating to Albany."⁴

Burgoyne quite agreed with Washington. It seemed to him when he got as far as Fort Edward in his march southward, and received reports that one-half of the people he came to subdue were running away in a panic of fear, and that the other half were listening to his proclamation, very anxious to take the oath of

loyalty to the king as quickly as possible. He had heard a little about the region of country to the south of him, called "The New Hampshire Grants," and he had the impression—a true one—that the people in that part of the country were hostile to New York; and the general, who was a man of a quick mind, reasoned that these people, who hated New York, would, in consequence, be very glad to submit to him.

The English officers, with that rude and stupid contempt for the colonists, which did a great deal to bring on the American Revolution, began to bet, not on whether they would reach Albany or not. That was a foregone conclusion. They forgot "Bunker Hill." The trip ahead looked safe and easy to veteran

soldiers who had nothing to fear from perhaps a few "peasants" — yeomen is the right word — who might not all run until they really saw the red-coats, and who might even summon up courage to take a shot or two first. And so the wager was — how many days it would take them to arrive.

There was a decided panic when Burgoyne began to advance on his march south. Thanks to General Schuyler, who did all that he could to obstruct them, the progress of the English army was very slow, only a mile a day. But it was steady advance. On the 30th of July Burgoyne was at Fort Edward. His^s threat to turn the Indians loose alarmed the settlers in Western Vermont, who understood the horrors of such warfare. General Burgoyne

spoke of the Americans who had become offensive to the king as "wilful outcasts." He said, in his proclamation, that God would forgive him if he incited the Indians to scalp and torture the hardened enemies of Great Britain, even women and infants. Farms in the region were hastily abandoned. The roads leading to the south were crowded with fugitives — men on horses, on foot, rude vehicles filled with frightened women and children, household gear, cattle — all making for a place of refuge. And a number, inclined all along to the Tory side, decided to make themselves safe, and so they sought the protection of the English general.

Burgoyne, in "happy ignorance" of what really lay before him, was

advancing with a splendid army. There was alarm, retreat, submission.

But there were men among those green hills like David Robinson. His mother started to join the fugitives. He said to her, as he persuaded her to come back: "If we must die, let us all die together." Not, however, without a fight for life, and liberty. There were patriots who were not frightened when Tories and Indians were reported so near that the rustle of the corn in the fields near Bennington might hide the stealthy enemy. Ethan Allen⁶ was a prisoner in the hands of the enemy, or he would have been ready for service in that hour of dire need. Warner was at Manchester with the remnant of his regiment. The Vermont Council of Safety joined Warner. At once a

call was issued to all the officers of the militia in the newly-made State to send on all the men they could possibly raise. Ira Allen wrote to New Hampshire for assistance against a "large scout of the enemy disposed to take a tour" to Bennington.

New Hampshire had already determined what to do. When the news of the evacuation of Ticonderoga and the progress of the enemy south had reached the Legislature of New Hampshire, John Langden, the Speaker, thus addressed the members:

"I have three thousand dollars in hard money. I will pledge my plate for three thousand more. I have seventy hogsheads of Tobago rum, which shall be sold for the most it will bring. THESE ARE AT THE SERVICE OF THE STATE. If we succeed in defend-

ing our firesides and our homes, I may be remunerated ; if not, the property will be of no value to me."

Meshech Weare, President of the State of New Hampshire, replied to Ira Allen at once. They had to decide and act quickly in those two weeks before the battle. President Weare sent at once three battalions of State militia under command of General John Stark. General Stark had left the service. He felt wronged because Congress had promoted junior officers over him. But he promptly forgot his personal grievance. He was ready again for service. Joy animated the militia when Stark took command and led the way to Manchester, ready to act under New Hampshire, which State gave him liberty to decide where to go and when

to strike. Massachusetts sent men and arms, and in response to the urgent call that "lead would be positively wanted," also two tons of lead. The one pair of bullet moulds in Manchester was kept "hot and busy." The goods and chattels of all persons who had joined or should join the common enemy, were seized and sold to pay for the defence.⁷ Patriotic parsons — who preached in the days when the gunpowder on hand in the town was often kept under the pulpit for safety — delivered war sermons. Parson Dewey⁸ was one of them. He preached a sermon in Bennington Meeting House the Sunday before the battle. He told his people to take arms and go and fight for their country. Parson Allen came with a detachment of militia. How he con-

ducted himself will be related a little farther on.

By the 7th of August, Stark was at Manchester with 1400 men ready to follow wherever he led. In the midst of these preparations, General Schuyler, who was doing all that a brave man could to prevent the advance of Burgoyne on Albany, sent General Lincoln to bring General Stark and his militia out of New England to the Hudson. General Stark⁹ did not feel obliged to obey. He refused, and showed the written terms on which he had consented to take the field. He, however, sent word to General Schuyler that he would join him when he saw for himself that he and his men should be in that part of the country.

General Schuyler did not know when

he sent for General Stark that there was a design to take the store houses at Bennington. And he seems to have forgotten that the people on "the Grants" were in danger.

By July 29th, General Stark had certain information that Colonel Baum, a German officer whose valor had been proven on European fields of battle, was thus commanded by General Burgoyne :

"Mount your dragoons ; send me thirteen hundred horses ; seize Bennington ; try the affections of the country ; take hostages ; meet me a fortnight hence in Albany."

Burgoyne knew when he gave that order that Bennington was a depot used by the New England militia, a centre of supplies—horses, provisions, ammunition. Food was becoming

scanty in his army. He also wanted horses for some of his dismounted dragoons.

But while General Stark knew about the orders to Baum, as late as August 13th, he was not sure exactly where the patriots would be needed. He moved on, accompanied by Colonel Warner, who left his regiment at Manchester under command of Lieutenant Colonel Safford,—when he decided, as it turned out, he was right, when he came with his brigade and encamped about two miles west of the inn on the green at Bennington.

By that time the Council of Safety had moved from Manchester back to Bennington, and sat in anxious deliberation, but with stout hearts, in the “Council Chamber” of “The Catamount Tavern,” hard at work,

seizing the arms of the Tories for use, their other property so sell.—It seems worth while to digress here long enough to say that in those days there is evidence that the Tories found little comfort from either army. A British officer spoke of the enemy as rebels, but the Tories he called “damned traitors and scoundrels.” And he was not the only one of the British that had that opinion.

To resume the thread of a narrative which may easily become incoherent because there is so much to say, Stark and Warner were, when wanted, exactly at the right place,—for Baum was on the way to carry out the orders of Burgoyne. He left the Hudson August 11th and started on his march to Bennington. He reached Cambridge on the 13th ;

took some cattle, horses, carts and wagons ; also a few prisoners. And he was fired upon by an assailing party. From here Baum sent a dispatch to Burgoyne that he had been informed the Americans were eighteen hundred strong at Bennington.

The skirmish at Cambridge was at once reported to General Stark, at his headquarters, by his scouts employed by the Council of Safety, who consulted Stark and Warner as they gave orders. The scouts were Bennington men. Their names were Isaac Clark and Eleazer Edgerton. When they made haste to carry this news, they thought they had only to report that a hostile party of Indians had advanced as far as Cambridge. They did not know that Colonel Baum was not far behind.

General Stark at once sent two hundred men under Lieutenant Colonel Gregg to meet the Indians. On the morning of August 14th, Colonel Baum reached Van Schaick's Mills and found Gregg and his men in possession.

Here we have the story, a version of what took place in a letter written by Colonel Baum to General Burgoyne. He begs pardon of his Excellency for the hurry of the letter, and explains that it is written on the head of a barrel. He writes that when he came to the mill, he found a part of the enemy in possession, but they left at once, "in their usual way, fired from the bushes, slightly wounded one of the savages, broke down the bridge and took the road to Bennington." "By five pris-

oners here they agree that fifteen hundred to eighteen hundred men are in Bennington, but *are supposed to leave it on our approach.*"

Colonel Baum writes in this confident tone to his superior officer, but in a narrative of the battle said to be written by an officer with him, it is stated how the writer noted that though the Americans retreated, they left the impression that they fought not only like men conscious of their own courage, but were confident in the strength of the support which was back of them. The bearing of the Americans, the rumors as to the garrison at Bennington, seem to have startled Colonel Baum and the boldest of his troops.

General Stark received more complete information than the first report

of the scouts. As soon as he heard of the enemy in the rear of the Indians, he did not wait for them to come to him. On the morning of the 14th, he assembled his brigade and the militia in Bennington and vicinity, sent to Manchester for Colonel Warner's men, issued orders for all the militia to come with speed—and marched to meet the enemy.

When General Stark had proceeded about five miles, he met Colonel Gregg retreating before Colonel Baum. Stark at once drew up his men in order of battle. The enemy came in sight. But instead of advancing they came to a halt on a rise of ground which gave them the advantage. General Stark sent out small parties to skirmish with the

enemy. Thirty of the enemy were killed or wounded, without any loss on the American side.

General Stark was ready to begin the fight ; but Colonel Baum seems to have declined the invitation from the despised Yankee farmer.

Perhaps it was because the ground did not suit either side. Be that as it may — like some other points in this brief account, it is one for experts to decide — General Stark, unmolested, marched back about two miles and encamped. He called a council of war. Warner and all the officers helped to decide on a plan of attack for the next day.

The next day was August 15th. It rained in torrents. This postponed the plans of General Stark.

Baum¹⁰ had been instructed to keep

his ranks always in order, with military precision, and that if he should happen to meet decided opposition, then he was ordered to put his regulars in a position which would be a good defence and throw up intrenchments. The work was more difficult than Burgoyne had thought likely, but he prepared for the chance. As Colonel Baum saw something of the strength of the Americans," he obeyed orders and took his position on a hill behind the Walloomsac River. The hill rises abruptly more than three hundred feet, washed at its base by the river. The force under Baum worked hard all day, on the 15th, in the pouring rain, constructing a breastwork of earth and timber. An exact idea of the work, and the location of some of the outposts cannot be given here.

But it is enough for the general reader to know that everything possible was done in the time they had by brave soldiers, who were skilful and experienced, to defend themselves.

A hill concealed the camp of General Stark, about two miles away. While the force under Baum were hard at work in the rain, the Americans kept up a skirmish. The outposts of the British were attacked and driven in.

Night came on. The hours passed in both of the camps. Little time was lost in sleep. That combative Parson Allen became impatient. Before daylight on the 16th, he addressed the commander: "We, the people of Berkshire, have frequently been called upon to fight, but have

never been led against the enemy. We have now resolved, if you will not let us fight, never to turn out again." General Stark replied. He asked Parson Allen if he wanted to march then, when it was dark and raining. "No," admitted the Parson, "not just now." "Very well," continued Stark; "if the Lord shall once more give us sunshine, and I do not give you fighting enough, I will never ask you to come out again."

The dawn of the 16th of August came. After the storm of the day before there was not a cloud in the heavens. There was a perfect calm. From within the main intrenchments on the hill above the river, the men looked down over a scene of pastoral beauty, a wide sweep of stately forest,

green meadows, fields of ripening grain, here and there a log hut—a home. It all looked so quiet; not as if an enemy was near.

Baum ordered his men to eat their breakfast. Soon reports came in. Columns of men were approaching. They did not look like what he called *soldiers* to Baum. He thought they were Tories seeking his protection. Duped, he called in his pickets. Captain Frazer thought Baum was mistaken. And so, it is said, did most of the troops. But Baum was slow to believe that it was really so. They were caught in a trap.

The Yankee farmers, of stout English stock, were also up early on that fateful morning, each one as impatient as Parson Allen to begin the day's work.

The plan of attack, as nearly as can be made out, was as follows: Colonel Nichols, with two hundred men, taking a wide circuit through the woods northward of Baum's redout, was to get upon the rear of his left, undiscovered as long as possible. Colonel Herrick, with three hundred men, taking a wide circuit southward, was to get in like manner on the rear of Baum's right. These two were to join and begin the attack. Meanwhile, to divert attention from that proceeding, upon the success of which everything else depended very much, Colonel Hubbard and Colonel Stickney were to get before the breastworks made by the Tories, and one hundred men were to march toward the front of Baum. General Stark, with the remainder of his

force, was, at the right time, to charge on Baum in front.

All this took up the early part of the day. There was continual skirmishing. The detached fortifications seem to have been carried early in the action. Particulars of this part of the battle have not been preserved.

Stark and Warner¹² rode up at one moment to reconnoitre. They were fired at from the cannon. They came galloping back. Stark cried out to his men: "Those rascals know that I am an officer. Don't you see that they honor me with a big gun as a salute?"

Baum's men kept up firing all day whenever they saw the sign of an enemy. But there was little if any reply from "The New Englanders" until about three o'clock in the after-

noon. Nichols, in the rear, seems to have begun the actual attack.¹³

Eleazar Hanks had so far felt it his duty to remain at home, because his wife was ill. He listened, however, as he kept at work near his cabin. He heard the battle begin. Then he left his wife in care of her father, took his musket and ran to join his fellow countrymen.

A soldier in Captain Dewey's company, with Colonel Herrick, hearing the firing begin from the party on the north, cried out: "My God! What are they doing? They are killing our brothers! Why are we not ordered to fire?" In a moment came the order to advance.

As for the Indians with the British force — when they heard the firing begin, they began to feel alarmed.

They yelled: "The woods are full of Yankees!" and fled out of the fortifications on the hill, down, away, as fast as they could run, in single file, jingling cow bells, as they beat a hasty retreat between the parties of advancing men, thankful to get off, as most of them did, though a few were shot.

The deadly fire at last began in the rear and on both flanks. General Stark, in his saddle, pointed to the enemy and made that laconic address: "There are the redcoats, and they are ours, or this night Molly Stark sleeps a widow!"

Parson Allen, let loose at last, climbed a stump and exhorted the enemy to lay down their arms. They replied by shots. The Parson got down and took his gun.

The Americans with grim determination moved forward in front, in flank, in the rear. They fired from behind logs and trees as they advanced. The Hessians, thus attacked on all sides at once, rose above their works to fire. On came our militia, without cannon or bayonets, through fire and smoke ; they mounted those well-fortified breastworks, facing the cannon of the enemy hard at work. The tumbril, with the ammunition of the force under the British, exploded, shaking the earth. The men under Stark were arrested but a moment by the violence of the concussion, then quick to guess what had happened, rushed up the steep ascent, sprang over the parapet, shot down the cannoneers.

After that, the battle became a

hand-to-hand struggle. Each man was capable of managing for himself. We catch glimpses of hero after hero, animated during that two hours' fight by the spirit which won the victory. John Fay, as he raised his musket, exclaimed, "I feel that I am fighting in a good cause." They were his last words. As he spoke, a bullet hit him. He fell dead. The cry rang out, "John Fay is shot!" Maddened, his fellow townsmen leaped over the breastworks and fired their guns in the very faces of their foes. Leonard Robinson, whose aim was quick and deadly, declared that every time he fired his gun he saw a man fall. "But," he said afterwards, "I prayed the Lord to have mercy on his soul, and then I took care of his body."

Such men — Ebenezer Webster, the father of Daniel Webster, was also there, fighting gallantly — gained the Battle of Bennington. Indians fled ; then Royalists and Canadians. The Hessians fought on, preserving their discipline until they had not a cartridge left, then they drew their swords and charged their foes, with their Colonel at their head. At last, Colonel Baum received his fatal wound. Then the remaining Hessians ran down the hill to escape. That afternoon was very warm. The Hessians were in full and heavy uniform, and heavily armed. The Americans, in shirt and trousers, would not have looked splendid on a dress parade, but they had the advantage in pursuit. For over half a mile, party after party of our men continued

to attack, kill or take prisoners, the retreating Hessians.

For two hours the roar of the conflict had been, in the words of Stark, like "like one continuous clap of thunder." The battle seemed over. Colonel Baum — his sword captured by Thomas Jewett — lay mortally wounded, in the midst of death. The victory of the Americans seemed complete. The prisoners were sent to Bennington. The militia dispersed over the bloody field, some looking for the dead and wounded. Others were in search of plunder.

Suddenly — it was an hour or two before sunset — says Jesse Field, in his narrative of the battle, the report of cannon was heard. Another British force was coming — the reinforce-

ments under Breyman. Soon the sounds of their drums and fifes were heard in the distance.

The scattered militiamen, worn out, hungry, taken by surprise, were ill prepared to meet the advancing foe. It is said that General Stark himself, tired and stiff, was roused with difficulty to meet this fresh attack.

On came the enemy, the cannon in front, clearing the way. Silas Walbridge describes the rush of the Americans to the scene of action. But for a time all was confusion. Some of the officers ordered: "Forward!" Others, even General Stark himself, it is said: "Retreat!" And that Warner, when he heard it, called out: "Stand to it, my lads; you shall have help immediately!"

A constant fire was, however, kept up all the time by the Americans, generally from behind trees. Though there was retreat—until the remnant of the gallant regiment which had checked the advance of Fraser at Hubbardton, appeared on the scene. General Lincoln had sent them, as he was asked, to reinforce General Stark, without delay. And those one hundred and fifty men had marched all night in the drenching rain, reached Bennington wet to the skin, dried themselves, rested a little, and then pushed on, led by Lieutenant Colonel Safford, and rescued the day, which, after all, might have been lost but for their arrival in the nick of time.

As it was, Warner's men rallied when they came. The other troops

kept in order. Captain Jacob Safford says, in his narrative, that the action was warm and close for nearly two hours. Once Stark jumped from his horse to teach one of his men how to fire the cannon just captured from the enemy. Breyman's veterans were compelled to retreat. A British officer carefully says: "They, however—as many of them as could—retreated *at the last very hastily.*" Breyman got back that night of the 16th to Cambridge, and the next day to the British camp.

The battle was fought and won, it cannot be repeated in this story too often, by men like Thomas Mellen. He was in the rush over the breastworks in the first battle, he chased the Hessians until he met Breyman with his eight hundred fresh troops

and larger cannon, he ran back until he met a large body of Stark's men, then he faced about, firing all the time, he saw Warner's men come to the rescue, when the barrel of his own gun became too hot for him to handle, he seized the gun of a dead Hessian, into which his bullets went easier than into his own.

In the story of the battle—"that great stroke struck by Stark near Bennington," General Washington called it—too much praise cannot be given to each man who helped to win a victory which came like a ray of sunshine to the patriots. General Stark is quoted as saying: "Had each man been an Alexander or a Charles of Sweden, he could not have behaved more gallantly."

While the battle was going on, the

warm and sultry day passed slowly in the village of Bennington. The place was crowded with fugitives. The anxiety was intense. The Council of Safety, at the Catamount Tavern, received reports from the battlefield, and sent circular letters in all directions, as the cannon peals boomed over the hills, heard as far as Williamstown, letting the people know the news that Stark and his men had met the enemy.

A little boy, who was five years old on the 16th of August, 1777, lived to be ninety-two. In 1863, amid the Civil War, he could remember the boom of the guns fired at the Battle of Bennington.

Another small boy, never forgot how he stood in the village on the day of the battle and saw men hurry

past with scythes and axes, as well as muskets and fowling pieces, volunteers from all directions. It is on record that every man in Williamstown, except a cripple on crutches, shouldered his gun and rushed to the field of conflict.

The aged and infirm gathered in the meeting house and prayed for the men in battle.

The pastor, in days to come, of that same church, who wrote her name in his narrative, MRS. CAPTAIN ELIJAH DEWEY, and called her deed one of the "Battle Anecdotes,"¹⁴ was evidently satisfied in his mind that Mrs. Dewey was alive to what the duty and the necessity of the hour required of her. Mrs. Dewey staid at home in the tavern on the green, while her husband, and her brother, Colonel Brush,

were six miles away doing their part. She put in the day looking after large kettles of boiling meat, so as to have food ready for the men on their return. Captain Isaac Tichener arrived in the village while the battle was going on, stopped at the tavern and ordered dinner. Mrs. Dewey promptly refused to give the stranger a meal. He pointed to the kettle of meat and demanded to know why, in the midst of plenty, she asked him to go hungry. Mrs. Dewey's eyes flashed as she answered: "That meat is for the men who have gone to fight for their country, where you ought to be." Captain Tichener quickly cleared himself. He explained that he was on public service, getting supplies for the American army. Upon which Mrs. Dewey

relented, and gave the tired young commissary his dinner.

As the afternoon shadows grew longer, there came decisive news. A letter, still preserved, written by Secretary Fay, at Bennington, and sent as "a circular" dispatch, reads:

"Stark is now in action which has been for some time very severe. . . . The enemy were driven, but being reinforced, made a second stand, and still continue the conflict. But we have taken their cannon, and prisoners, said to number four or five hundred, are now arriving."

The prisoners were marched into the village, bound two by two. Aaron Hubbell was one of the guards. The women took down their bedsteads to use the rope to string them on. The old meeting-

house was packed full of captured Hessians. A number of Tories were also among the prisoners.

In a house near the battlefield Colonel Baum lingered through the night, guarded by Captain Robinson, who "watched gently as a woman by him until he died," and was wont to say that "a man more intelligent and a braver officer than this unfortunate one I have never seen."

Colonel Baum and the Tory Colonel Pfister were buried near the Walloomsac; the exact spot is not known.

Some of the Hessian prisoners who died were buried in the church yard. The spot is now marked by a granite monument, near the quaint tombstone, decorated by a cherub arrayed in clerical "bands" of Parson Dewey.

Paul Revere was sent for some of the prisoners and marched them to Boston. The dead bodies of the foe left on the battlefield were promptly buried that same night. Mr. Harmon lost not a minute. He realized how quickly a pestilence would breed in the hot, damp August weather, and with the heroic resolution of the day, himself dragged one hundred and sixty bodies to two large excavations, made for wintering potatoes, which became the graves of a large number of the invaders.

And some of the Americans lay right down among the corn near where they had fought, and slept until the next morning. "When I woke up," one of them used to tell, "I was so beaten out that I could not get up till I had rolled about a good while."

While they took this well-earned repose, there was the hard work told of, and more, that night in Bennington, after the battle. In the midst of the exultation, the wounded were cared for, as well as they could be. One of the duties of Eleazer Hawks, who has appeared before in this short story, was to help to carry the wounded on ox carts to the town. The dead were brought, those from Bennington, to their homes. The American loss was forty men dead on the field. Four of them were from Bennington. All died in the prime of life. All left widows and children.

The landlord of "The Cata-mount," Stephen Fay, had sent five of his sons to the battle. One was John Fay, shot and killed instantly.

The news was brought to Stephen Fay. They broke it to him that he was unfortunate in one of his sons.

“What,” asked the father, “did he misbehave? Did he desert his post? Or run from the charge?”

“No, sir. He is among the slain. He fell contending mightily in the cause.”

“Then I am satisfied,” were the sublime words of the venerable patriot. Bring him in! Lay him before me, that, at my leisure, I may behold this darling of my soul.”

The corpse of the son—they brought it, laid it before the father, all besmeared as it was with dirt and gore.

The father called for a bowl of water and a napkin. With his own

hands he washed the dead body of his son, wiped the gaping wound with "a complacency," so he said, which before he had never felt.

And then in a firm voice Stephen Fay thanked God that he had "a son who was willing to give his life for his country."

John Fay, all who fought and won the battle of Bennington, were, according to the testimony of their general, animated by a courage and a strength of purpose which made them heroes. They all risked, and some gave up their lives for a cause they thought good. They "struck a great stroke" for the patriot side — the side of the struggle led by Washington.

Washington rebelled, to quote from his own letters, against "the

most despotic system of tyranny ever practiced in a free government." He was not willing to "supinely sit and see one province after another fall a sacrifice to despotism."

It seems necessary to make it explicit, in these days when there are writers who take great pains to prove that the English government was not despotic, that Washington, if we can take his own words for it, fought for liberty because he felt that the Colonists were being deprived of their rights as English freemen; and not simply because he wanted to help the colonies to cut loose from English rule.

The news of what was done for liberty near Bennington cheered Washington at an anxious moment in the conflict—and hope returned.

“Not the least among the grounds of exultation,” writes John Fiske, in his brief account of the Battle of Bennington, given in his history of “The American Revolution,” was the fact that an army of yeomanry had not merely defeated but annihilated an army of Brunswick regulars, with whose European reputation for bravery and discipline every man in the country was familiar. The bolder spirits began to ask the question why that which had been done to Baum and Breyman, might not be done to Burgoyne’s whole army.”

A. F. B.

Notes

- 1 On January 15, 1777, a convention was held at Westminster Court House, which voted, "That the district of land commonly called and known by the name of New Hampshire Grants be a new and separate State and for the future conduct themselves as such."

The author of that Declaration of Independence, Dr. Jonas Fay, was a Bennington man, and member of the "Council of Safety."

The young State was named Vermont, in June, 1777.

- 2 Samuel Robinson, Senior, was the leader of the band of pioneers who settled the town of Bennington, in 1761.

The settlers came from Massachusetts. They were guided on their way by marked trees, as they rode on horseback. As they neared the line, they raced their horses — men and women — each one eager to be the first to arrive in Bennington.

3 Schuyler was a skilful general and a noble patriot — one of the noblest.

But it may be no wonder that in those days the Vermonters were unable to think justly of him, or to speak kindly.

4 The British plan, for the summer of 1777, was to move three armies at once.

Burgoyne was to come down from Canada and take Albany.

St. Leger was to ascend the St. Lawrence to Oswego, and come down the Mohawk to Albany.

Howe was to move up the Hudson and unite with the other two at Albany. The plan was to cut the colonies apart at the line of the Hudson.

5 It is related that Colonel Baum, as he lay dying, said that “the Americans fought more like hell hounds than like soldiers.”

The hardy yeomanry knew how to fight; and they were especially exasperated because Burgoyne had given out that he would use Indians—let loose “fiends.”

But there is no evidence that at the Battle of Bennington the American militia “were guilty of enormities too horrid to think of.”

The “hell hounds” were the Indians on the other side.

- 6 Ethan Allen came back to Bennington in June, 1778 — “his once burly form gaunt and worn by the cruel captivity from which he had just been released, but his bold spirit as robust as ever. The people thronged into the little hamlet to greet their old leader, and though powder was scarce and precious, the rusty old cannon. . . . was roundly charged, and thundered forth a welcoming salute.” . . .
- 7 “This,” says Ira Allen, in his history, “was the first instance in America of seizing and selling the property of the enemies of American independence,” and such is believed to be the fact, though the measure was afterwards pursued in all the States.
- 8 It is related of this same Parson Dewey that upon a previous occasion he was preaching on “the character of God.”

Ethan Allen was present. He gave close attention to the sermon. The Parson made a statement which displeased the bold Colonel, who sat in a prominent pew. He jumped up, exclaimed in an audible voice, "THAT IS NOT SO," and started to leave the meeting house.

Parson Dewey pointed the forefinger of his right hand at Colonel Allen, and called out in a stern voice, "Sit down, thou bold blasphemer, and listen to the word of God."

Allen immediately resumed his seat, and listened with respect to the rest of the sermon.

9 Congress censured this insubordination, but after the battle, General Stark was made a brigadier of the Continental Army.

10 The expedition under Baum consisted of a corps of Riedsell's dismounted dragoons — the same that had behaved so gallantly at Hubbardton; a company of sharpshooters, chosen with care from all the regiments, and under Colonel Frazer, a most excellent officer; Peters' corps of loyalists, to be swelled as they proceeded; a

body of Canadian Rangers; Hanau Artillerists, with two cannon; a hundred and fifty Indians.

And to support Colonel Baum in case of necessity, General Burgoyne stationed Lieutenant Colonel Breyman at Battenkill, twenty-two miles from Bennington, with two cannon and a strong body of German regulars.

- 11** The force of General Stark consisted of three regiments of New Hampshire militia, respectively commanded by Colonels Hubbard, Stickney and Nichols; a small body of militia from the east side of the mountains, under Colonel William Williams, of Wilmington; a corps of rangers under the authority of the Vermont Council of Safety, commanded by Colonel Herrick; a body of militia from Bennington and its vicinity, Nathaniel Brush, Colonel, of which there were two companies from Bennington, one commanded by Captain Samuel Robinson,¹⁵ and the other by Captain Elijah Dewey, who had just been joined by part of a militia regiment from Berkshire County, under Colonel Simmons — making his whole force to amount, probably, to about eighteen hundred men.

12 “ Vermont has given Ethan Allen the first place among her heroes, has set his marble effigy in the national Capitol, in her own, and on the monument that marks his grave ; yet to that brave and modest soldier, Seth Warner, the knightliest figure in her romantic history, the State he served so well has not given so much as a tablet to commemorate his name and valorous deeds.”

13 A map of Bennington Battle was drawn by Lieutenant Durnford, an engineer with the British.

14 And now seems the time to add some anecdotes of the battle, which should have come in before, only it was hard to decide just where.

Captain Samuel Robinson, in the battle, was loading and firing like the rest, when a ball sang, on its way past, very near his head. He dodged. Soon another on the opposite side made him jerk his head again. Mortified, he turned round to his men and called out : “ Boys, keep your eyes on me ; and if I dodge again, put a bullet through me sideways ! ”

Eleazer Egerton, in the midst of the second engagement, was firing away from behind a tree, when he noticed a young man looking for the same defense. "Here, boy!" he shouted, "take my tree. You fight behind, and I'll fight before. The rascals daren't shoot me; they know me." He was as good as his word. He planted himself with his back to the trunk of the tree; and there he stood firing until the Hessians did know him, and fear him, and fled beyond the reach of his bullets.

"Old Uncle Silas Robinson" used to tell this story in a sarcastic voice to hearers who could appreciate his irony. "I had heard," he would say, "that these Robinsons were all cowards; and I rather thought," he drawled out in his dryest tone, "if any of them was, I was the man. But somebody told me that gunpowder was good for courage; so I took about a gill of gin, and thickened it up with powder; and when I had drunk that — I tell you, *then I fought!*"

Another surviving soldier told how Warner rode near, and some one, pointing to a dead

man by the wayside, said to him: "Your cousin is killed."

"Is it Daniel?" inquired Warner.

"Yes."

Warner jumped off his horse, stopped, gazed in the dead man's face, then rode on without saying a word.

15 The roll of Captain Dewey's military company, as it was constituted at the time of the battle, has not been preserved. Of Captain Samuel Robinson's company, the following is a list of the men in the battle:

Robert Cochran	Daniel Biddlecome
Gideon Spencer	Levi Hatheway
William Henry	Abram Hatheway
Henry Walbridge	Reuben Colvin
Rufus Branch	Eliphalet Stickney
John Larned	Daniel Rude
Thomas Abel	Benjamin Holmes
Nathan Lawrence	James Marivater
Josiah Brush	Mr. Alger
David Fay	Ammie Fuller
Leonard Robinson	Jonah Brewster
George Dale	John Clark
John Marble	Jehoshaphat Holmes

Ephraim Marble	Moses Rice
Aaron Hubbell	Benjamin Whipple, Jr.
Samuel Safford, Jr.	Silas Robinson
Aaron Smith	John Weeks
Ephraim Smith	Moses Scott
Samuel Henry	Alpheus Hatheway
Edward Henderson	Solomon Walbridge
Jonathan Haynes	Ebenezer Bracket
Archelaus Tupper	Jehiel Smith
Daniel Warner	Asa Branch
Lieut. Simeon Hatheway	Phineas Wright
Aaron Miller	John Smith
John Fay	Jesse Belknap
Elijah Fay	Silvanus Brown
Joseph Fay	John Forbes
Stephen Williams	John Rigney
William Post	Elisha Smith
David Safford	Solomon Safford
Jared Post	Joseph Roe
Jeremiah Bingham	William Terrill
Samuel Slocum	Noah Beach
Josiah Hurd	Simeon Sears
Ezekiel Brewster	David Robinson
Solomon Leason	Joseph Safford
Thomas Selden	Isaac Webster

Wm
K.C.

